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Hungarian foreign policy

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Hungarian Foreign Policy.

By

COUNT ALBERT APPONYI.



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By COUNT ALBERT APPONYI.

After the numerous blows dealt the Hungarian nation during the past few years, the cruel peace treaty imposed on Hungary had the effect of a thunderbolt. It stunned the nation. It took a long time before she became herself again, before the strong feelings excited by the treaty had calmed down again, and were superseded by sober arguments. To-day the Hungarians have reached the stage which, though their sentiments have not changed, enables them coolly to consider their position. The guiding principles of their foreign policy are based on the firm ground of reasonable argument. The following are the fundamental facts that are to decide the course of Hungarian foreign policy in the future. First of all the fact that conditions called forth by the Trianon treaty, like those in all Europe, sprung from the treaties imposed on the conquered countries, are not only inequitable but bear in them the seeds of future ruin. The second truth of fundamental importance is that for the present it cannot be assumed that any modification of the treaties is to be expected within a short time. The power to overcome all resistance is still to-day in the hands of those who have drafted the treaties and imposed them on the vanquished. Coolly considered it is a psychological impossibility that those who have composed the treaties should now, with the ink not yet quite dry on the paper, start the work of revision. To carry through this revision against the will of those in power who today adhere to the whole of the treaties concluded from Versailles to Trianon, relying on our own strength alone or on the com-

bined military force of the conquered nations, is an unreasonable thought, or rather an attempt that would mean the jeopardizing of the future of nations, that of the Hungarian nation in particular.

Here we have to deal with two points at issue, in apparent contradiction with each other: According to the one, the situation caused by the treaties is untenable; in conformity with the other, no psychological basis exists to effect their modification, to make possible the work of revision being carried out. The conclusion to be drawn from these facts is that a sound Hungarian policy is possible only on the basis of the treaties, that these have to be considered the starting-point, and that the foremost task of that policy is to give assurance that Hungary does not aim at a forcible modification of the treaties. It were most perilous to play with a thought which Hungary would not be able to translate into action. There is no advantage to be derived from such a course, rather harm and imminent danger. Does that mean that the Hungarians put up with the thought of mutilated Hungary? That they adopt the attitude of resignation? By no means. This is what I have asserted also abroad. I was asked by a prominent member of public life in France "whether Hungary were inclined ultimately to resign all hope of territorial vindication, as this was the condition to his knowledge, to bring about normal political relations to her neighbours and the Allied Powers". Upon which I replied: "To what good should I lie, as it is quite clear you would not believe me? No. Hungary is convinced that these treaties and the situation to which they have given rise cannot endure; they are untenable not only from Hungary's standpoint, but — this I wish to emphasize — also from the point of view of Europe and all the civilised nations since they are adverse to their interests. This will be recognised only when these nations will have come to share Hungary's conviction of it. The psychological moment for it has not yet arrived, could not yet have arrived, but it must come, there is no doubt of it. Till then Hungary will not run the risk of political adventure, but attempt the acceleration of the advent of that moment by quiet, assiduous work."

It were an entirely fruitless endeavour, be it in the Hungarian propaganda or in the conception of Hungarian foreign policy, to begin to build on the frail structure of sentiments, exclusively to consider Hungarian interests merely. This would but little touch the Western nations. It is Hungary's task to assimilate her rights with the common interests of civilised nations. The perfect assurance with which I watch the evolution of events is based on the truth that what affects Hungary must be disadvantageous to all civilisation, and that what Hungary wishes is also the desire of Europe and of the ethical reconstruction of the civilised nations.

Hungary's rôle in Eastern Europe.

This assurance rests on two most simple assumptions. The one may be pronounced in the form of a question: Does it lie in the interest of Europe to establish conditions in Eastern Europe which will safeguard stability, peace and prosperity? This question can only be answered in the affirmative. For if little Macedonia constituted the hot-bed of infection for all Europe, how much more imminent is the danger that would result from the Balkanisation of all Eastern Europe? It is a fact that Eastern Europe is declining economically, is but a small consumer and does not produce what the West needs, particularly as the huge body of the Russian realm will be out of connection with the economic life of the world for some time to come as yet. To which must still be added that powerful England and France are threatened with an economic crisis. Under these conditions it is the duty of the Western states to aid the human race at its most critical juncture. Otherwise it will be impossible to restore the balance, as the laws of economic life cannot be annulled by empty phrases. The solidarity of feeling among men may be destroyed by hate. But this is not possible with respect to the solidarity of economic life. At the time of the robber barons it sometimes happened that the one enlarged his fortune by robbing the other. To-day a nation cannot possibly prosper by bringing financial ruin on her neighbours. The destruction of one organism would involve that of the other.

This, then, is the one assumption: It lies in the interest of Western Europe to establish peace and order and the preliminaries for a sound economic evolution in Eastern Europe. The second point at issue touches the question of the maintenance of peace in Eastern Europe. The sole conceivable basis for it were a strong Hungary capable of life. It is easy to prove this. The witty remark of a Frenchman comes to my mind: "To criticise myself means self-absorbtion; but my judgment will be milder when I compare myself with others". This also the Hungarians may say about their country. No doubt, the present condition of public safety is not an ideal one, — there are many symptoms to be traced in the soul of the nation which fill the observer with regret and pain. It is not to be denied that Hungary emerges but gradually from the frightful collapse of the past few years. But to-day the Hungarians may ask: What nation was able to rise more quickly than they? Without prejudice I venture to say that mainly during recent times symptoms of progress and a sound evolution preponderate. Thus we are entitled to speak not of a temporary state of things but of a stable course of evolution.

What are the components of present Eastern Europe as created by the peace treaties? Three states have come into being on the borders of Hungary, formed from her territory, by the severance of two-thirds of her people. According to the conception of the inventors and authors of the peace treaty these three states were to be the safeguard of peace and order in Eastern Europe. But in order to ensure stability, peace and order in the future, it is essential that one rests on a firm basis. Those three states would have been enabled to look to a splendid future, strength and prosperity within their natural borders, but not one of them possesses a single preliminary condition for unity. The historical Hungarian state was in possession of all but one of the conditions of an organic unity: It formed, as affirmed by all the geographers of the world, the most beautiful geographical unit existing in Europe: a uniform net-work of rivers, the central incline of the valleys, to such an extent that apparently the Lord God Himself had made Hungary a uniform country, Hungary was

in possession also of a uniform historical tradition, and that tradition cannot be wiped off her face. One can pass to the order of the day by omission of historic rights, but one cannot possibly refute historic facts. If history repeats the same thing for a thousand years, it gives vent to the constant nature of things. Only one item was lacking to render the unity of former Hungary a perfect one: the unity of race. This lack was the cause of many difficulties, but by no means so grave as was reported, and not unsurmountable.

Let us now look at Hungary's neighbours. They are as little in possession of that sole factor of organic unity, the unity of race, as historical Hungary. Neither Roumania nor Serbia, but least of all Czecho-Slovakia possesses that unity. In respect to race they are as mixed as Hungary was. In that regard the status is an equal one in the best case. But the countries do not possess any of the attributes bestowed on Hungary, which a Slovak peasant of Trencsén once so well illustrated when told he ought to feel happy now to belong to his kindred — "That's all right (said he) but will the course of the Waag change backwards so as to enable us to float our wood to *Prague* instead of to *Budapest*?" The new state lacks the geographical attribute and, what is more, the historical traditions as well. Alien races of adverse interests meet there. The enlarged states do not possess a single life principle. Within its natural borders each of these states might have well developed and flourished; now they are beaten by their very aggrandisement. Can states whose coming into being was the derision of all state-maintaining, organic principles, safeguard stability and peace in East Europe, — states which already during their honeymoon have to struggle against destructive forces and whose ruin is prevented only by the application of coercion?

As compared with this, Hungary, even in her present mutilated state, represents an imposing picture, as the motive principle of organic unity finds expression even in this truncated Hungary of to-day. This Hungary — I venture to maintain — overtakes all other states which have suffered through the war as far as internal consolidation is concerned. This

Hungary proves to the world that fixity of purpose and orderliness are ruling within, and it is clear that this country only can form the basis for the peace and stability of Eastern Europe. Thus it is not merely in Hungary's interest but in that of all Europe to strengthen her, to restore the sources of strength of which mutilated Hungary has been deprived.

I had not said everything when I declared that the newly-formed states, or those enlarged at our expense, derive as little advantage as old Hungary did from unity of race. When I mentioned that, they and Hungary were equals in this respect. I have said too little. For from the racial point of view conditions have grown worse in these states, as in each of them a race on a higher level of civilisation has been subordinated to one of an inferior degree.

It is not only the Hungarians who assert this. Some days ago the judgment of impartial foreigners came to my knowledge. A mission from the American Unitarian Church having spent three months in Transylvania, to examine the consequences of Roumanian rule there, summarised the impressions gathered in their voluminous report as follows: "The national grievances and attempts at vindication of their rights on the part of the Hungarians do not concern us, we have objectively investigated the matter from the point of view of humanity, and we are forced to state that the rule of the Roumanians in Transylvania has given rise to unendurable conditions there. Several millions of people accustomed to Western manners and form of government have been subjected to a national rule which employs semi-Eastern methods of government and professes quite Oriental moral conceptions. The position is similar to the one that would ensue if two million Americans were subjected to Mexican rule". What has been said with regard to Roumania must be stated also for Yougoslavia and in a lesser degree for the Czecho-Slovak territories where the rule is in the hands of a Western nation which is careful not to lose entirely her good reputation. However, those having sojourned in that country can tell a tale of Czecho-Slovak "government".

Another question is whether it serves the interest of human civilisation to extend or to narrowly confine its scope.

The leading statesmen of the West were liable to be deceived in this respect. They observed but the students of the neighbouring states who had attended Western universities. It must be remembered that the intellectually exclusive class is nearly the same in every nation. The question is to be decided by the measure in which the masses led by their instincts are satiated with Western conceptions and morals. The interpolation of a nation in the current of Western thoughts might be achieved if the majority of the nation partakes of the intellectual life of the West. Since the Hungarian people adopted Christianity they have not only based their institutions on Christian principles but have elevated them to a higher standard. The Hungarian nation has survived all Western currents of thought, good and evil, in the same way. The storms of the Reformation stirred Hungary as much as Germany and France; the ideals of the French Revolution were cherished by the Hungarians as much as by the other nations. However, that current was arrested on the frontiers of this country. Hungary's neighbours took possession of that culture only so far as inflexible mimicry goes, but Hungary was able to add to it from her own store and to develop it. Hungary is the only representative of the community of Western culture in Eastern Europe, the border of Western civilisation, and will remain so for some time to come. It is Hungary's vocation to plant Western thoughts and ideas in the soil of her neighbours. If the West weakens Hungary, it will, purposely or otherwise — owing to the amazing ignorance with which it treats East European affairs, probably otherwise — restore the preponderance of the Eastern way of thinking, break the might of Western civilisation, and thus trespass on the laws of human progress.

League of Nations and Rights of the Minorities.

In a recent speech Count Albert Apponyi declared that, though they did not think of making the revision of the Trianon treaty their programme, they ought to try to render

valid the rights and prerogatives assured them by the treaty, particularly the minorities' rights of their kindred in the territories severed from Hungary. The Entente Powers had made treaties with the neighbouring states in order to ensure the minorities' rights. They who knew the situation could not doubt that the terms of these treaties would be carried out according to Balkan traditions. On the basis of these treaties Hungary had the right to speak. They wanted to avail themselves of this right through the proper medium, their diplomats, and the tribunal of the League of Nations.

He then proceeded: I believe in this thought though not in the sense in which it was interpreted in the peace treaties. But the thought, once kindled, must not be rejected, but rather further developed, which course of action has been adhered to not only in America but also among the Entente Powers themselves.

I have taken part in the session of the executive council of the union formed for the purpose of promoting the League of Nations, at which session was set forth the programme of the ensuing general meeting. In that session it was unanimously resolved to make the modification of the treaty referring to the League of Nations the main item of the programme. Thus I cannot help believing in the thought. And when I remember the numerous indictments charged in the past against Hungary, and against her nationalities' policy in particular, I regret that at that time there did not exist a tribunal competent to decide these questions. Hungary's position would now be a different one if those complainants had been forced to prove their accusations. The moral effect of such accusations attested before the tribunal must not be underrated. The nations will be convinced by the League that conditions prevailing in those territories are unendurable indeed. Thus Hungary will attain either an improvement of the position of her kindred or that of the position of the country itself owing to the incorrigibility of her neighbours.

Human Interests Hungary's Guidance.

On whom, then, is Hungary to rely? There is little to be said in this respect. My personal view in this regard is

not yet matured. The less so as the foreign political situation of the whole world will be subject to reorganisation. It were recklessness on Hungary's part to pledge herself to any definite course. I want to point to but two instances. Every simple-minded reader of newspapers is aware of the fact that these treaties must be constantly modified and amended. I am no soothsayer, but I venture to predict that the present Paris Conference will in a few weeks be followed by a renewed meeting where new dissensions will have to be adjusted. However, I will not dwell on them. But there are two huge notes of interrogation — America and Russia. We are holding our breath expectant of the 1st of March, when the new President of the United States of America will be installed in office and decide the future course of action. The outlook is a hopeful one and cannot be troubled by the deceptions practised by Wilson. We hope that the policy of veracity and sound reason will triumph. I do not expect anything to be done for Hungary merely for her own sake. I expect every one to act in his own interest, and I expect from the leading nations that they will not lose sight of the bond that unites all civilised peoples, since it has been proved that the interests of all civilisations meet in the economic sphere. The public life of America is pervaded by utilitarianism and much idealism as well; thus also the most calculating politicians must take into account the elements of idealism to be found in the soul of the American people. For this reason I hope that America, unable effectively to use her large economic surplus, will, in her own interest, aid those who attempt a rational reconstruction. In respect to Russia (the second large question mark) it is an evil affecting all the world that this realm of 160 millions is out of contact with it. I cannot say when the rule of the Communists will break down but I think it possible that it will burn itself out. That this process will take some time, considering the dimensions involved, seems certain, as well as the fact that Hungary ought to get into touch as early as possible with the factors struggling against Bolshevism. Yet in face of these two questions at issue I must say that to-day I cannot yet advocate a definite

attitude as to our policy in the Near East. In conformity with the actual state of things I must declare that among all Western states it is France that betrays most appreciation and amicable inclination towards Hungary. This does not mean that Hungary is to neglect other economic or political connexions with the Entente or non-Entente states. Her interests do not lie with either the one or the other groups, but have to be pursued in common with the overwhelming interests of all mankind.



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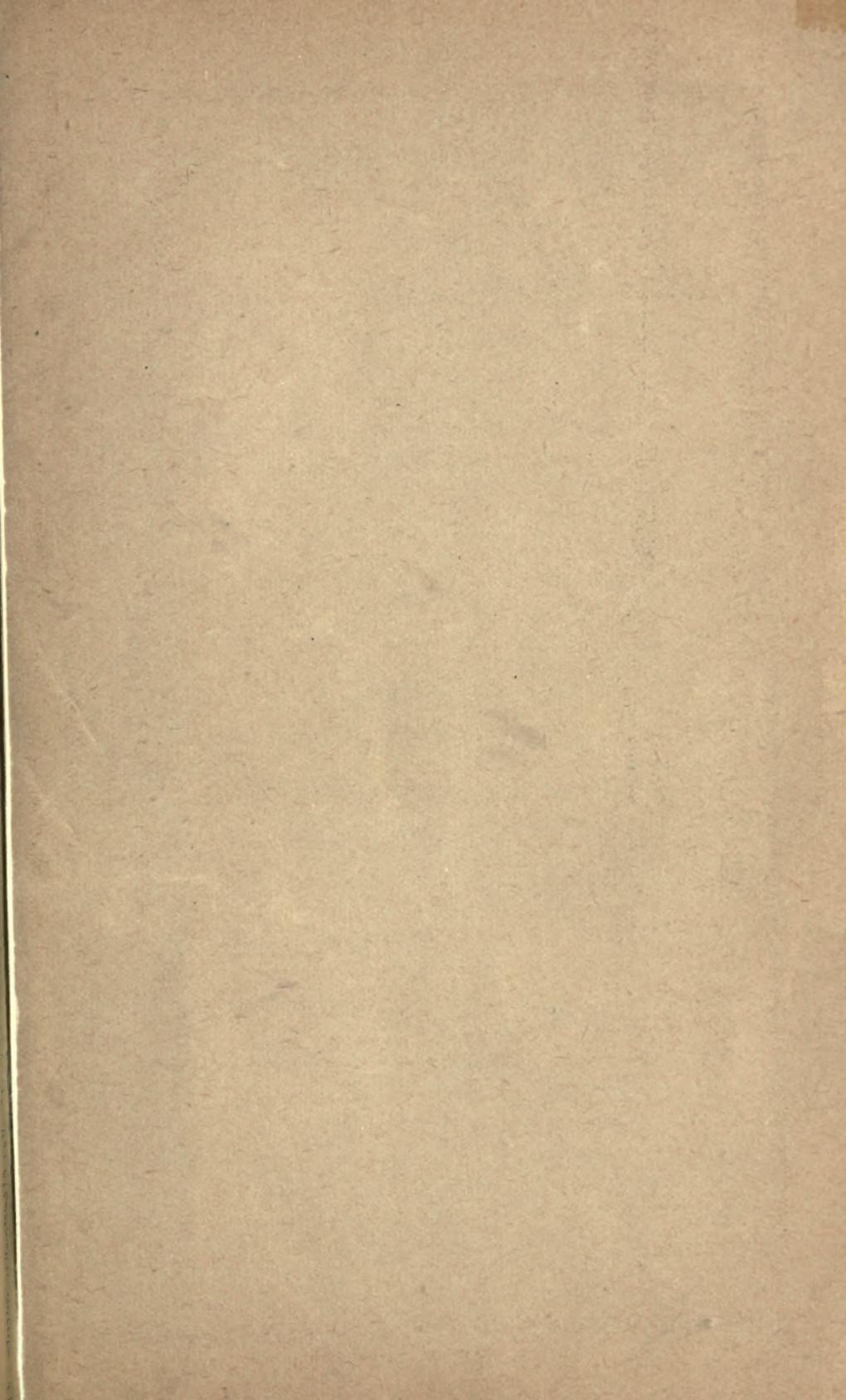
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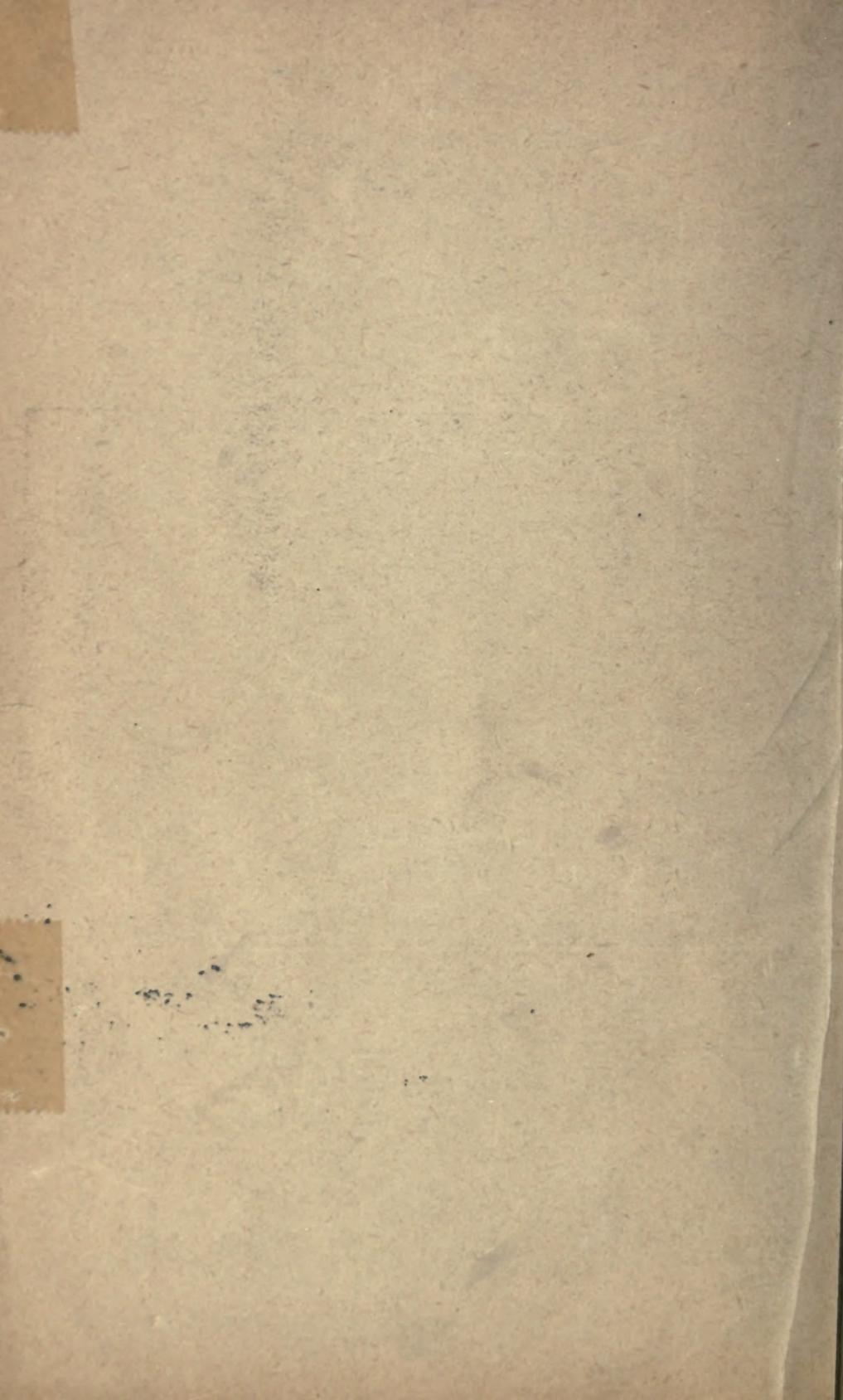
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